

[W. H. Childers]

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Life history Rangelore

Phipps, Woody

Rangelore

Tarrant Co., Dist. #7 [123?]

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[W?].H. Childers, 71, was born on his father's stock farm in Wood Co. When Childers was two, his father decided to move near his relatives in Cook Co., so he moved and settled on Sivells Bend, in Cook Co. Two Yrs. later, the family moved back to Wood Co. where his father established the first gin. When Childers was five, his father removed to Sivells Bend, and established a stock farm. His father and Col. Jot Gunter established the Turkey [Track?] Ranch in Cook Co., Childers was 13. Then he was 18, he was employed as a cowboy on the ranch. Colonization of the property began when he was 21, and was completed when he was 23. He and his father then retired to the stock farm at Sivells Bend. Following his father's death in 1900, he sold the stock farm and moved to Abilene, Texas, where he now resides. His story:

"Yes sir, I was born on the range when it was all open, and my whole family, kinfolks and all, were on it at the time. While the range itself has changed completely, I still have a son in the saddle and making good. His name's Cecil Childers, and he's a polo and rodeo rider. He's in the show here at the Fort Worth rodeo right now, and stands pretty high. I

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reckon you've heard about him, though, so I'll tell you about myself. He sort of took after his dad about his hoss topping.

"Now to begin with, I was born on my dad's stock farm in [Wood?] Co., Sept. 5, 1868. I don't recollect much about the first place because my dad moved the family to Sivells Bend in [Cook?] Co. when I wasn't but two years old. He done that to work with A.Y. and [J.W.?] Gunter, a couple of uncles of mine who ran stock in Cook Co. C. 12 - 2/11/41 Tex. [Box 1?]

I'd already begun to ride ponies when my dad decided to move back to Wood Co. when I wasn't but four. I still don't recollect much about that, either, but I do know that he put up the first one 2 hoss gin ever in Wood Co. that year. The neat year, he'd sold out his gin at a good profit and moved back to Sivells Bend, taking four wagon loads of lumber to build a house with.

"Now there's a thing about that country that can't be seen any where today, and that's the grass they had then. It was so high, that when the lumber was unloaded, the men'd have to hunt for it to find it. Actually, it was so high that in later years when I rode man size hosses, the grass'd turn the rowels on my boots, and I'd be topping a hoss about 14 hands high. It was from knee to hip high on an ordinary man, and when we'd be in there, running the mowing machine and putting up hay for the winter, we'd never see the blade. The only way we knowed where the blade was, was by watching the grass right even to the right of where we had the machine. It'd rise up, then lean to one side. It was so thick that it didn't even fall when it was out but leaned on other grass. It only fell when we came along and stacked it for drying. You've seen the big haystacks they have on farms? Well, that's what I mean. Another thing, too, and that's when cattle laid down. You just had to almost stumble over them to find them in the grass.

"The location of the place dad built was just N. of where Gainesville is now, and on the old Buffalo Hide Trail. Just after we settled there, my Uncle Harper Gunter moved in with a

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fair sized hoss cavvy, and he hadn't been there two months 'til the Indians raided his hoss herd and got every head. Now, the way they done it, was to shoot the old Grey bell mare with arrows to keep her from giving the alarm, then drove the cavvy off. Soon's Uncle Harper found it out, he organized a bunch of the neighbors and chased the Indians. They lost a lot of time because they had to 3 trail the Indians every step of the way. Just to show you how the old timers could do it, though, they caught up with the Indians in the Territory and would've fought them if they hadn't have run. The trailers might have lost the hoss cavvy if they'd have give chase, so they let the red skins go and took care of the hosses. They got every head back.

"I really didn't pay so much attention to dad's place while a kid, but I can tell you about myself. I learnt to ride hosses so well that by the time I was six, I could ride a running hoss barebacked. In fact, I never had a real saddle 'til I was 14 years old, and on my birthday, dad made me a present of a saddle that cost exactly \$14.00. A good one for those days. Prior to that time, when I wanted a saddle, I'd get an old tree that the leathered all worn off, take a rope and work a short loop around the hoss, then tie it up short. I didn't even have any stirrups, and must have looked a sight while riding around over the country in that rig.

"Not having a good saddle didn't bother my cow work, though, because I just went right ahead, and worked like a regular cow hand with my dad's stock. My dad was the first to have the 'Turkey Track' iron in Cook Co. That was his iron, and nobody else run it 'til he went in partners with old Col. Jot Gunter, who had another ranch in Grayson Co.

"I reckon I was about 13 years old when dad and the Col. done that. They established the Childers-Gunter spread in Cook Co., and run around 3,000 head in the Turkey Track iron, I don't recall just how many acres there were in the spread, but it was so big it run from St. Jo on the North, to [Hyra?] on the East, and to Munster 4 on the Southwest. It was about four miles across, and about nine miles long.

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"The family never went to the Turkey Track but stayed right on the stock farm. In fact, dad put me and my younger bud, Cyrus, in charge of the place and with orders not to neglect it but to work it like it belonged to us. And, that we done. Cy' and me sure run that place, even though he wasn't but nine and me 13 when dad left.

"That was the way of the old timer days, though. Kids got to be men a heep quicker'n they do nowadays, and Cy and me went in the roundups just like we were men. You see, all the neighbors's get together, and roundup all the cattle in that part of the country, then cut out what belonged to each other.

"We had quite a bit of trouble with a man named Bill Mallock, though, because he fenced a 40 acre pasture and so many cattle were ruined on it. We never lost any, except when we went to driving, and they'd head right for that fence everytime, it seemed. You see, it wasn't but a one strand fence, but the strand even when it was on the top of the posts, would just barely be hid by the tall grass, and the cattle'd run right into it. When they ran sideways into it, the barbs never failed to cut leg muscles and we'd then have to shoot the poor critter. Sure made a lot of folks mad around there, and they cut it down humpteen times, but old Bill put it right back every time and they finally let it stand. So many head, of stock were ruined that it's always been a wonder to [me?] why some of those crusty old pioneers didn't cut Bill down.

"The real reason why they didn't, was because Bill was noted for being a bad shot, but he could fist fight and rough and 5 tumble wrestle. In those days, men didn't shoot unarmed men, but when two of them had an argument, they'd give each other the same chance and shoot it out. Most of the arguments settled that away were settled right in town. They'd be across the street from each other, see each other and start walking to the middle of the street. They'd usually get about 30 paces from each other, then both draw their pistols at the same time. The truest first shot then won the fight, but Bill Mallock was a problem. He wouldn't even tote a gun. Instead, he'd dare a man to meet him in a man to man fist fight or any way he wanted to make it, and the other man always got the worst of it when

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that happened. All the trouble quieted down when more people moved/ in and fenced their places. Then, the first thing you knowed, the whole range was fenced in.

"I was just a happy-go-lucky kid on the stock farm, and that's the reason I can't tell you a whole lot more about the old place before I went to the Turkey Track. I know we had a few stampedes, but not any big ones. And, there were drouths, and so [on?] that come to bother the cattlemen, but I can't say much about those things.

"When I reached my eighteenth birthday, dad sent for me to come on the Turkey Track. When I got there, I was hired as a cow punch at \$20.00 a month and chuck.

"About the first thing I done in the line of work after I reached the Turkey Track was to go with some other cow punchers over to the 'Anchor T,' Col. Jot's other ranch in Elm Flats in Grayson Co. This was a bigger spread, covering over 25,000 acres and running around 8,000 head of stock on it. The iron was made like this: . 6 "There was quite a difference between the Anchor T iron and the Turkey Track. To make the Turkey Track, we only had one running iron, and made three burns at a time. When it was finished, it looked like this: . When these cow punchers I spoke of and myself went over to the Turkey Track, we went after 50 hosses that had been shipped from the King Ranch and busted on Col. Jot's hoss ranch he had in connection with his cattle. He run so many hosses and sold too, that he had to have a regular hoss ranch and he'd ship them in from South Texas after the wild ones around there played out.

"These 50 must have been ear marked for the Turkey Track because Col. Jot's Anchor T hadn't been put on them, but they'd used a running iron instead and put the Turkey Track iron on. We were certainly glad of that because its a lot of work to brand wild hosses, or hosses that have been fresh busted. You see, they're still wilder'n a jack rabbit and liable to cause a lot of trouble when they're still fresh busted and you go to put some iron on them. While the men Jot hired regular as hoss busters were experts in that matter, they didn't take to that part of the work themselves.

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"We started that drive, and its still a night mare to me, how much trouble them ornery critters gave us cow punchers. They'd bolt at every opportunity, and when one was bolting one way, some of the others'd try to bolt another. We were a whole week making a drive across the country when we should've made it in a day's time.

"You see, it wasn't over 50 miles to the whole trip, but if dad hadn't have sent as many as he did send to make the drive, 7 we'd have never made it back with all the hosses. The way we worked it was, when a bunch bolted, some of us'd take after them while the rest stayed with the cavvy. When they'd get back, we'd drive on, then another bunch'd bolt. That's the way it was the whole trip over.

"When I got back to the ranch, dad sent me out as a check line rider. Our duties as check liners were to keep the cattle back from the fence where there was one. You see the whole range still wasn't fenced except in valleys. Then we repaired wire where somebody'd go through and leave it down, see about water holes and drive the stock across country to other holes if there were some around a dry hole, and in general, see to the welfare of the stock.

"I rode the check line for a whole year before dad sent for Cy' to come over the Turkey Track. Then he came over, dad went to Houston Co. to but cattle. A couple of weeks after he left, we got a wire telling us to go to Houston. He met us when we got there, and took us out to a place where some cattlemen were driving in a bunch of Spanish longhorn steers. There were three train loads when dad got them loaded up, and he went back with one, Cy' went with one, and I came back to the Turkey Track with the other.

"These cattle were put out on a fenced pasture for a year where they fattened. After they fattened enough, dad had them drove to the railroad and loaded up again for Kansas City. This time, Cy' and myself went with the cattle. Out of Oklahoma City, the cattle were put in two trains instead of three, because the trains were able to haul more there. That's the way trains were in the olden days.

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"You know, When the cattle train come out of Houston, I'd 8 catch the engine, and ride there 'til about half way to the next stopping point, then I'd swing off and watch the cars as they passed by me. If I'd see any of the critters down, I'd swing on and prod them up before they were stomped to death, then I'd get off and let the rest of the train pas by 'til the caboose reached me, then I'd swing on. When the train went out of Oklahoma City, I noticed that I had trouble making my catch, but I done it anyway. Then when we got to Kansas City, the beef price wasn't as much as dad thought it should have been, so he ordered us by wire to take the cattle on to Chicago. Well, that we done. I caught the engine as usual, and when we got along a ways, I swung off at the top of a hill, but I noticed that the hill didn't make so awful much difference to the engine and that it was catching up speed pretty fast so I swung back on. Then I got to studying things over, and you know, if I hadn't have swung back on there at the first, I'd have been left way out there, miles from nowhere. Those big Eastern engines were a heap different from the little old [hoggers?] Texas had in them days. Of course, its all the same now but it wasn't then.

"We were met at the train by the commission [co?] dad had to handle the beef, and they took things over from then on. Cy' and me then took the town in, and I expect the town must have took us in too because they certainly did stare at us. I can well recall how they stared, but we stared right back because we thought they certainly did dude themselves up funny when they went out any where. We took in a number of dance halls and saloons, and were invited in on gambling games a number of times. That was one thing dad had warned us against, though, so we didn't accept any 9 of their kind invitations.

"The second day there, Cy' and me decided that we wanted to dodge all the attention we were getting, so we stepped into a men's clothes emporium, and had them fit us out with the regular duds the ordinary people in Chicago sported. We didn't cause any body to stare at us then, and made the same rounds we made the day before to see if anybody'd make any remarks about what we'd done. Very few of them showed they recognized us, and when they did, it was only by a nod of some sort.

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"Along in the evening of the third day, we decided we'd had enough of the big city and were figuring on leaving the next morning when we come out of a dive and saw two men holding up [a?] third. Since this place was downstairs, and the door stood open, these fellers couldn't have knowed we were coming out right then. I just don't know what to think about it now, but when Cy' and me saw what they were doing, we decided to get in on the fun. We walks up behind the feller that's got the gun on the victim and Cy' says, 'Reckon you fellers better high-tail it before we ventilate you.'

"They looked around and saw Cy's big old buckner in his fist, and one of them said, 'They're from Texas. Let's beat it.' And, sure enough, they ran away as hard as they could go it. The victim thanked us, gave us a card and told us to see him the next day and he'd show us a good time. We looked at the card, and it had the name of a dive just about like the one we'd come out of, so we decided not to look in on him. I still had that old card around in my stuff 'til here a couple of years ago when I throwed it away. Dad said it was some kind of a skin game and we done right. 10 "When we got back to the Turkey Track, we fell into the regular work as cow punchers 'til when I was about 21. At that time, Col. Jot had already colonized and sold off his Anchor T property, and him and dad were setting out to colonize the Turkey Track. As they colonized a section, they'd roundup cattle from off another section and sell them. Then they'd sell off that bunch and so on 'til I helped drive the last head off the Turkey Track when I was 23 years old.

"Dad made a wad of money off that deal, but had to split it all with the Col., of course. We all went back to the stock farm and raised fine stock 'til dad died just after the turn of the century. Not so long after he died, Cy' and me split up the inheritance and I moved out to Abilene, Texas, where I still live. Among the children my wife and I've raised was Cecil, and he made a real hossman, as I told you when I first met you. And, he's just starting in the game, too. If he can stick and stay 'til he gets more rodeo experience, he'll make a top notcher yet.